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CLEAR TYPE
AND
SHORTEST WRITING

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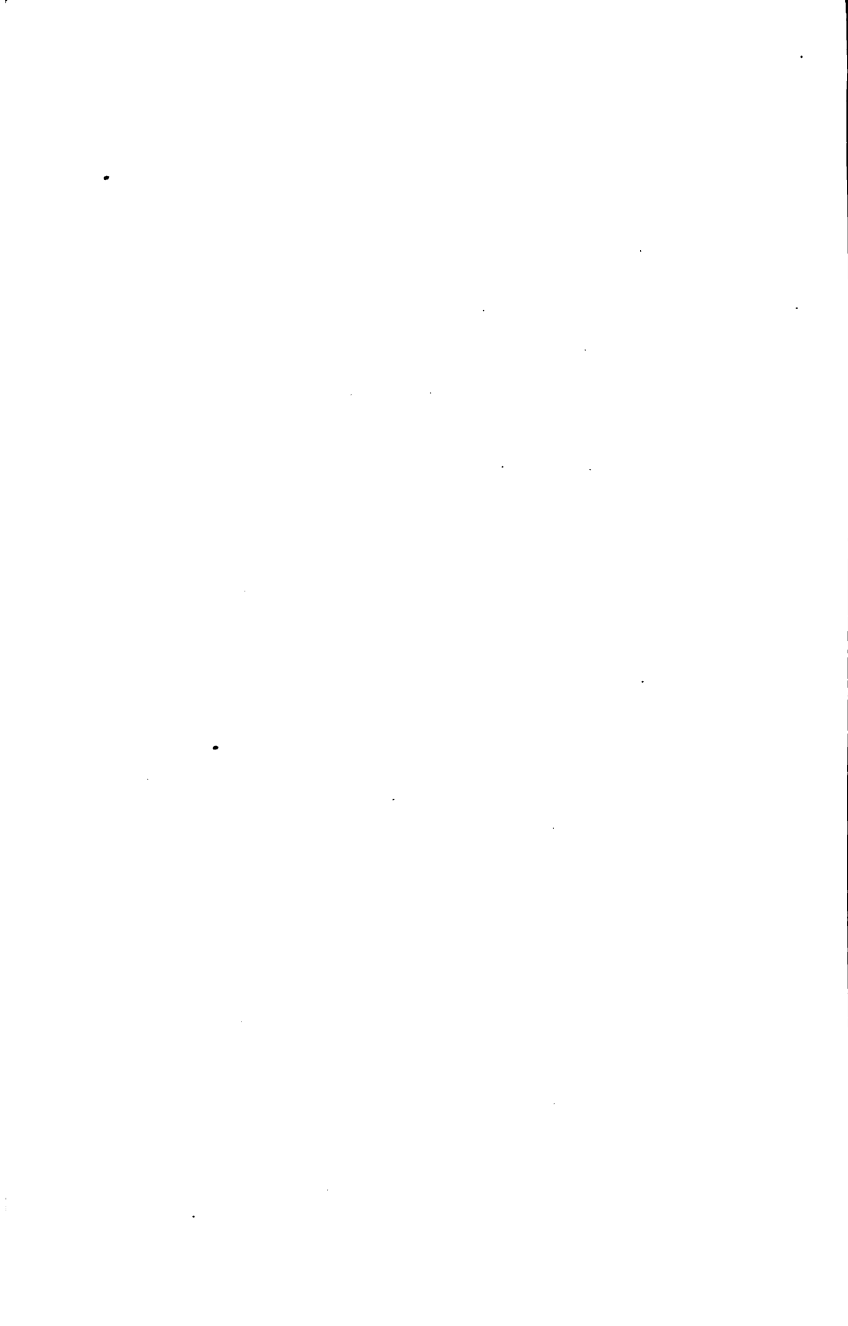
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ERRATUM

Page 9, line 14, for $\frac{1}{100}$ read $\frac{1}{14}$



CLEAR TYPE

A FEW SUGGESTIONS CONCERNING

TYPE, LETTERS, BOOKS

AND

HAND-WRITING

BY

S. MILLETT THOMPSON

The Riverside Press

1907

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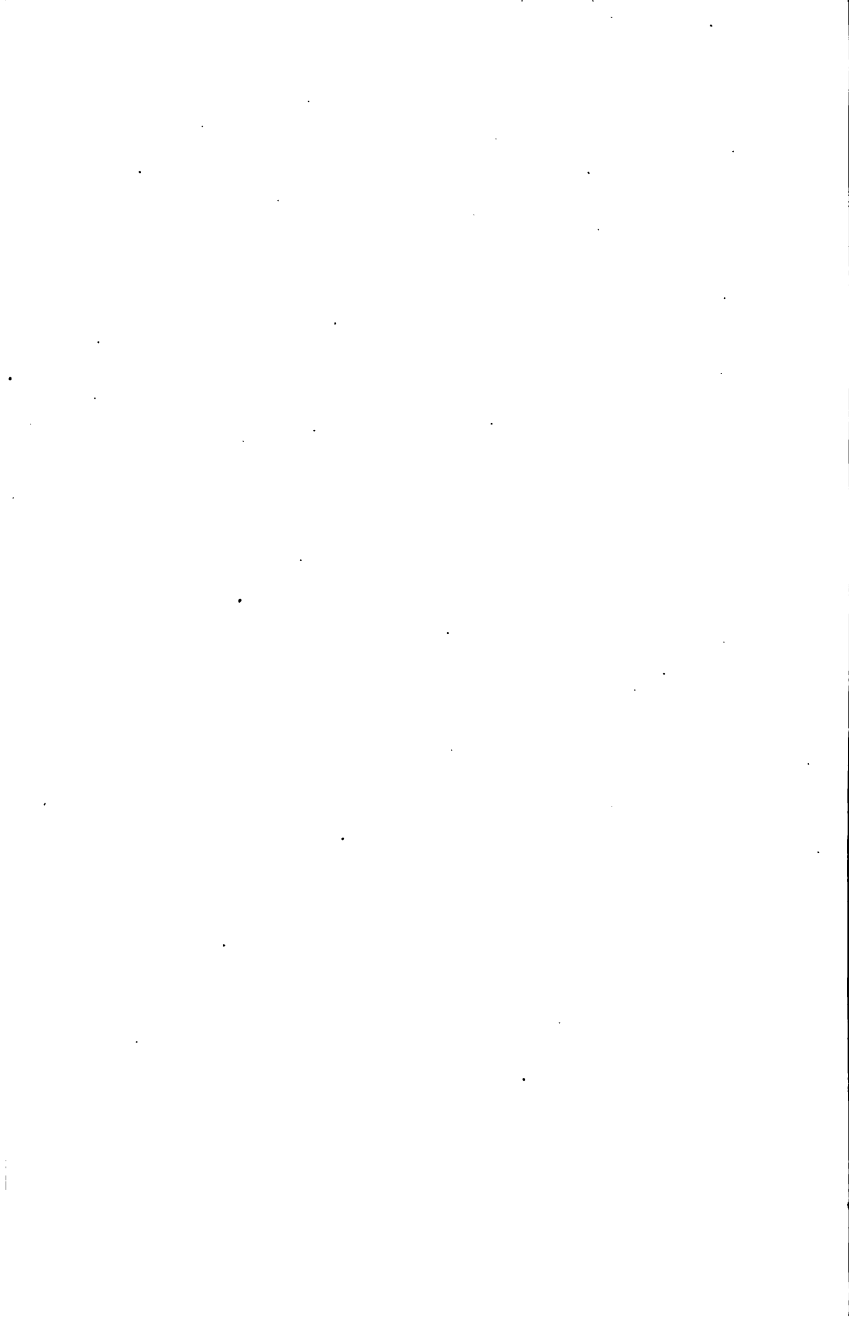
PREFACE.

Though I had never heard of a Type-Writing machine, an idea of such a thing occurred to me while in the Army, in May, 1863, and I then designed one (of which I still have the original sketch) and a special type for it, intending to employ sundry abbreviations. And because I had learned to spell by mental picturing of words, most words that I had ever carefully seen, especially in AMERICAN, Latin, and Greek, were clearly in my view.

These initial steps and much writing and extensive reading since, have caused me to study letters, names and words — and type — considerably, and to arrive, some years ago and quite independently, at the conclusions set forth in these few pages.

S. MILLETT THOMPSON.

PROVIDENCE, R. I., September 12, 1906.



IN GENERAL.

Any marked separation of the literary and the common language should be avoided; while time, space and economy demand that AMERICAN shall be continually compacting. A favorable result is possible only by way of an absolute exactness, terse, and which all may understand alike.

It appears that the vernacular alone is, and ever will be, a wrecking; that linguistics alone is, and doubtless ever will be, a quarrel, — and our good AMERICAN is forced to run a stormy course with both of them, and also between the purgatory of an indeterminate spelling (as yet no law) and the hades of general phonetics void of law, rule or reason.

In its uses with pen, pencil and type, and largely in the reading also, the language is so far in strictly mechanical operations as to appeal to an inventor; in any plans with reference to it, however, a person should seek to better build, as well as to remove.

In print the first move necessarily concerns body type — lower case type. And the style of type most in use — that used in the ‘common print’ found in Newspaper editorial columns, in Magazines and Books — produces a dull and greyish mass, — like a snow-field blown with sand, — indistinct, and also semi-veiled with ceriphs, scrolls, and finical projections on the letters.

Convention seems to have settled upon this style of type; and the chief aim should be to reduce space in its use, and also to make both letters and words more marked, sharper and clearer.

Of course I have made designs for changes in letters; but these pages are not the proper place for such designs, though I indicate some features of Clear Type.

PAGES.

A book of six hundred pages, of forty lines four inches in length, now requires, in the reading, a travel of the focal point of sight — the point of special regard by the eyes — twice over, or eight inches per line, — and this, too, with intense and critical application.

The result of all this is hard work; because such actual eye-travel, or sight-travel, over letter after letter and word after word, is a total of $2 \times 4 \times 40 \times 600 = 192,000$ inches = 16,000 feet = more than three miles, — of picking up sand from a snow-field — too often a very poor sand on a miserable field.

The saving of one fifth = 20 per cent = more than half a mile — from such a long journey, would appear to be a very easy matter, and not an idea nor a fact omitted.

To write such a book your pen point would travel, on paper, probably more than six miles straightaway.

LINES.

Persons read by the tops of the printed lines, — the eyes being far less concerned with the body or base of such lines; thus Clear Type follows the well known ways of common custom.

WORDS.

If the changes that are suggested in these pages are ever adopted at all, their adoption will be gradual, and possible only because the language is kept alive — dead and dying languages never change for the better.

Words and letters are only signs; but the burdening or beclouding either of them by use of the fifty or more different — diacritical — marks, in order to preserve the nice old lingual tones or odd elementary sounds, in our polyglot land, is a wasted endeavor, — the common people will not, cannot, learn them, and scholars will neither endure the waste and bother of writing them, nor attempt to speak by them — and would not be understood if they did.

All names, and all words and terms of a scientific or technical use, should be as nearly as possible in the spelling of the language whence derived — for such are words-universal.

Foreign words and phrases should be either avoided, or else written and pronounced as in their own homes, — all else is a sort of cheap and ever-changing “pidgin.”

We would better use plain, short, crisp AMERICAN words and terms, than gouge and mutilate their longer equivalents from abroad.

All personal names should be used exactly as their owners desire them to be; nicknames, and the use of the mere initials of any person's name, smack of low-breeding, the tramp-camp and cheap grocery.

ABBREVIATIONS.

In common writing the work of abbreviating comes first upon the many thousands of prefixes and suffixes:

The endings -able, and -ible, may often be written -al; and be very good, even if the a were pronounced as broad as in -ahl.

Similarly -ing may be written -en; and if so pronounced, be a decided improvement upon the too common "-in," or mere "-n."

Also -tion may often be written -ton; and -sion be written -son, and still be well understood.

The -ion in two syllables is far weaker than if pronounced as -yon.

One s is enough to write in -ness, and -less; and one l in -lly; while -us is often quite enough for -ous.

These endings are on about 6,000 words, among which choices may be readily taken. Of course a complete plan of abbreviating would not stop at these little affairs.

An easy, exact and practicable plan of abbreviations in AMERICAN, — especially for use in taking notes and in writing at first instance, — shortening such work by 50 per cent or near, — would rival in value the best of stenography — which few persons have time to learn. Here certainly is an open and fine field for a needed and very valuable work.

AMERICAN is the only correct name for the great and living language of our Nation as a whole. Firm rule and law are required, because local pronunciation, simpleton spelling, and the foreigners' brogues threaten to produce that mongrel wreck — 'general phonetics.'¹

¹ Note:— In AMERICAN i should not be pronounced as ee, nor e as ay. The on in -ion should not be pronounced as un. The outré "nayshun," "conshunts," "covetchus," "furnitchoor," and so on, and the blubbering "bl," in -able, and -ible, are worse than ridiculous.

LETTERS.

No new letters should be added to the Alphabet now in use — there are already too many.

As an *ideal* advantage in writing, and often in print also — avoiding general phonetics — the letter *c* might well be used as a sharp sibilant only; *s* as a soft sibilant; and *z* for all buzzing sounds.

Also *f* for all *f*-sounds, excepting in words of Greek or Latin origin having *ph*; *g* always hard; *j* for all soft sounds of *g*; *k* for all *k*-sounds — a most conspicuous letter, and especially desirable to replace hard *c*, and hard *ch*, — since *c* now demands half a dozen rules, and is easily mistaken for *a*, *e*, or *o*.

Then *q* — as now followed by *u*, is not so desirable for clearness as *kw*; for *u* is readily mistaken for *n*, or *a*, and *q* is a descending letter.

The conical *v*, and rounded *u*, are now distinctly separated in all good and high-class AMERICAN.

RADICAL CHANGES.

First Change: I. Capital A, with the bar removed, should be put in lower case, — matching the now delightfully sharp and clear v, and w.

II. The lowest curve of g should be cut away, as worse than needless, the next curve above slightly modified to base-line, and the whole letter narrowed — the marked ugliness of g is valuable.

III. If all the letters are to be retained unchanged in other respects, the present too broad, or too round — “fat” — lower case letters: a, b, d, g, h, k, m, n, p, q, s, u, v, w, x, y, and z, should be narrowed, as an average, by at least $\frac{1}{10}$ each; o should be made an ellipse; c have the dot larger; and e have the bar slightly inclined.¹

¹ Note:—To use a homely simile: Large and round stones in a wall are not so conspicuous as the tall and narrow pickets in a fence.

FIRST CHANGE.

This first change, in letter forms, alone — in its three parts — made in common print, would certainly shorten words — lines, columns, pages and books — by a total of $\frac{1}{10} = 10$ per cent — and demonstrably more, even if letters were a trifle farther apart in words; and all that, too, with actual gain in distinctness.

The above result with the space between words narrowed to the average width of one letter, would do away with much very fine print — the worst eye-destroyer in the universe of letters.¹

¹ Note : — No change in the height of letters is here considered — their tallness aids the eye. In order to be clearly understood, I have had these pages printed in the “common type” — 11-point size — referred to on page 2; and the Notes with type three points smaller — 8-point size, — the smallest type that should ever be used in a publication for students, or for general use.

RADICAL CHANGES.

Second Change: In print — lower case — all the descending letters: g, j, p, q, and y, should be so formed as to be raised entire, and made to stand on the base-line, in the same manner as now stand on the base-line h, and l,— all, excepting j, to be much narrowed; p, q, and y, to be made very narrow and angular; and the dot over j to be cut away.

By means of this second change — already wisely preceded in the use of figures, and easily designed — nearly $\frac{1}{10}$ = 10 per cent — of the space between lines could be saved — the whole interline space swept clean of useless underbrush — and a greater clearness gained; really in the reading little or no notice is ever taken of the descending parts, stems, of these letters — they are therefore practically useless, while causing lines to be diffusive — sprawled.

VOWELS.

The vowels: a, e, i, o, u, and y now treated as a vowel, are long, short, flat, open, hard, soft, and often interchangeable in values; and there is nothing now in any of them to decide anything. You must turn away from each vowel, and read four to eight rules in order to learn how to use it — and thus go hunting for near forty rules to cover all the vowels. As a partial remedy:

First: In common print the long sound of each vowel should be fixed by a small, but clear, mark at the top.

Second: All vowel sounds not thus fixed should be short; and no vowels to have any other mark whatever.¹

¹ Note:—No consonant to be marked at all. All sounds of a, not long, to be drawn so far as possible toward broad a, as heard in *ah*, *father*, or *a-final*; thus avoiding the flat, *cat-bird*, drawled-out a — as heard in *fair* — with its low-bred, nasal twang.

RADICAL CHANGES.

Third Change: Since we use now the common type, we must adopt the usual bar, or macron, to indicate the long sound of each vowel — a mere fixed lengthening, not for accent nor stress — and marking the vowels for no other sound or value:

Long a, as in tame, gain, ā.

Long e, as in scene, year, ē.

Long i, as in pine, high, ī.

Long o, as in home, though, ō.

Long u, as in tune, use, ū.

Long y, as in type, my, ŷ.

The short vowels, as in tan, pet, pin, hot, tun, city, and in all other uses and values, to have no marks, diacritical or otherwise.

This third change would shorten by nearly 10 per cent every page and column as now printed; while final e, silent letters, and doubled consonants would neither be used nor needed.

HAND-WRITING — SCRIPT.

Our first aim in these pages is to shorten, reduce, the hand-labor in writing — printing to follow. There are only twenty-six letters; and an illegible hand-writing should be regarded as inexcusable.

In hand-writing to indicate the long sound of a vowel, merely prolong the final stroke — omitting the usual dot over *i*:

A row of six handwritten script letters: 'a', 'e', 'i', 'o', 'u', and 'y'. Each letter is formed with a single continuous stroke, designed to be easily written and printed. The 'a' is a simple loop, 'e' is a horizontal stroke with a curve, 'i' is a vertical stroke with a hook, 'o' is a circle, 'u' is a horizontal stroke with a curve, and 'y' is a vertical stroke with a hook and a tail.

These letters were designed by me in 1875.

The short sounds of the vowels, being very difficult to spell or to pronounce alone, are usually only compared; their values, in actual use, will be made clearer by having the long vowel sounds definitely fixed, while also the consonants in words with short vowels will be strengthened.

Note:—A word is only a sign; and its mere form, or “looks,” is a matter of very minor consideration — thousands of now good words must once have seemed very queer.

NEED OF CLEAR TYPE.

Readers practical and of good sense — and they are the staid publishers' best customers — are constantly urging that a shortening and compacting of matter and space be made in all reasonable American publications, — and thus an end be put to those mere super-laminated heaps o' pulp — the cumbersome volumes.

Read into any page of common print the Three Changes herein proposed, — erasing the letters by them made needless and calculating the space saved, — and you will at once see their force.

Besides the mere space saved, nearly 30,000 words in common use can be shortened by one or more letters each. These Changes have been purposely divided; and it is better that the reader should find examples, as above, than that I should print pages of them.

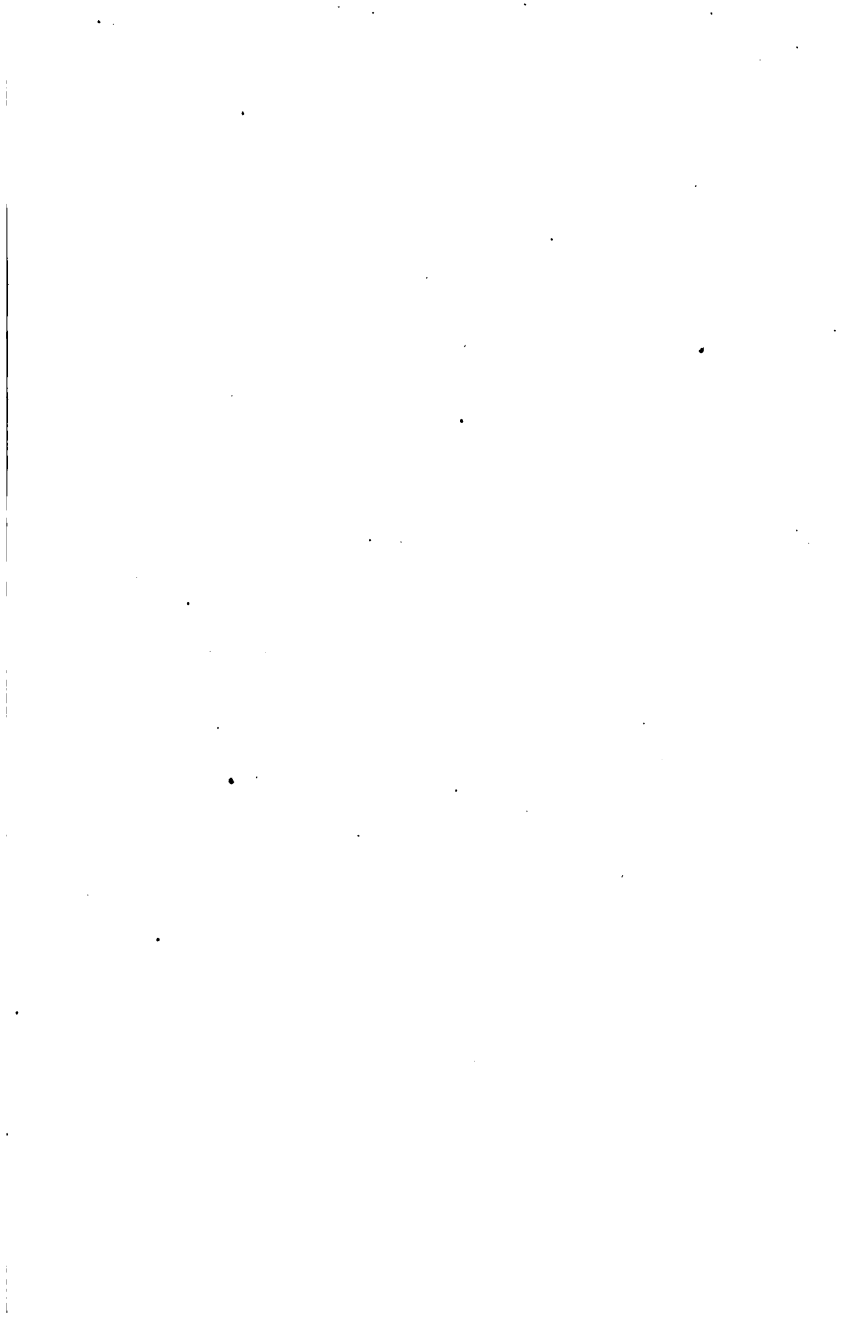
RESULTS.

Silent letters, doubled consonants, digraphs, and final e removed; the long, and consequently most of the short vowels made certain; spelling of words brought largely under a good and firm law, — and, between matter and space, nearly $\frac{3}{10} = 30$ per cent — can be saved from present methods, and all without the use of any small type.

At the least a fifty-column newspaper becomes forty columns and less; and a five hundred page book is brought to less than four hundred pages.

Then to the writer, editor, printer, proof reader, reviewer, and type-writer, is brought a saving of nearly one hour's work in every ten; and to the scholar, student, teacher — and to every reader — is brought unnumbered hours of gain — not to mention the less burdened eyes of all persons concerned.

Against all this positive saving and gain, comes no actual loss whatever.





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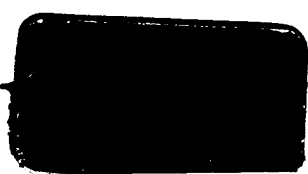


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